

'Fantastic Planet' has limited appeal

Reviewed by
ROBERT KIPPER

"Fantastic Planet" is an interesting but not very enjoyable animated feature from France that will have some difficulty finding an audience. It arrives at a time when things are finally stirring in the genre of the animated film. Two X-rated productions, "Fritz the Cat" and "Heavy Traffic," have challenged the sacred notion that only children could get turned on by full-length cartoons.

Yet "Fantastic Planet" doesn't fit in with most crowds. It is neither as wholesome as the usual animated film nor as bold as the X-rated productions. It is too serious and experimental for youngsters to appreciate, and too simple-minded for many adults.

IT WILL appeal to a rather select group of science fiction buffs and maybe adolescents. For the rest of us, it is a mixed experience.

Most intriguing is the film's look. It is a distant, antiseptic, almost soul-less one. It is about as far from the fluid Disney pictures as it can get. The warmth of rich colors is missing. The mood is chilling.

The animators have chosen their colors and effects with restraint. Graphic artists in the audience will be dazzled by the texture and mood and shading. Those accustomed to more eye-popping effects in cartoons will wonder what went wrong with the color.

THE FILM takes place on the futuristic planet called Ygam. On this turf, only the Oms (the Ygam name for humans) are recognizable. Everything else springs from the imagination of the animators, Rene Laloux and Roland Tapor.

It is their planet; they define its topography, its animal life, its climate, its architecture, the way its inhabitants eat, sleep and talk.

Dr. Szabo to conduct

Dr. Edward Szabo, conductor and musical director of the Oak Park Symphony Orchestra, will appear as violoncello soloist with the orchestra in its final concert of the season at 8:30 p.m. Tuesday.

The concert will be held in the Oak Park High School auditorium at Oak Park Blvd. and Coolidge. The orchestra will perform the "Elegy" of Faure and the "Concerto in A-minor" by Saint-Saens.

Richard Brown, principal violist of the orchestra and director of the Southfield Youth Orchestra, will conduct the orchestral accompaniment and the Overture to the "Secret of Suzanne" by Wolf-Ferrari. Dr. Szabo will return to the podium to conduct Tchaikovsky's "Symphony No. 5."

Dr. Szabo has appeared as conductor and soloist with various chamber music ensembles, including the Delphi Trio, Pro Arte Trio and the Montclair Quartet. He is a graduate of the Juilliard School of Music, where he studied violoncello with Leonard Rose. He received his doctorate degree from Columbia University.

For further information call 626-0238.

Cleo Laine to appear

Cleo Laine, the singer will return to the Music Hall Center for the Performing Arts, Detroit, April 5 and 6 at 8:30 p.m.

Cleo Laine will share the stage with a quartet headed by her husband, England's jazz saxophonist, John Dankworth.

Cleo Laine's career dates back to the early 50's and covers a myriad of talents. She played Titania in Frank Dunlop's much acclaimed production of "Midsummer Night's Dream," the title role in Ibsen's "Hedda Gabler," and scored a personal success in the 1971 London Revival of Jerome Kern's "Showboat."

SHE APPEARED in the film "The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone" and her voice has been heard on the sound tracks of many movies.

Tickets are available at Hudson's, Grinnell's and the Music Hall box office, 350 Madison Avenue (Monday thru Saturday, 10 a.m.-6 p.m.), or call 963-7680.

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Ygam is controlled by 39-foot creatures called Draags, whose red eyes glow to blue when they sleep and their legs curl up into tails. They eat by breathing in yellow fluff that looks like a cross between cotton candy and popcorn.

WHEN THEY meditate, they float away in bubble-like trances. Their destination? Another planet where they attach to headless bodies and dance with others as their method of



reproduction. When it rains on Ygam, diamond-like crystals fall. Any journey beyond the populated areas turns up a dazzling array of weird landscapes and exotic creatures.

"Fantastic Planet" is the most surprising and imaginative animated film since "The Yellow Submarine," the pioneer adult cartoon and still the best yet made.

UNFORTUNATELY, all its surface creativity is reduced by a standard science fiction plot.

This is the old story of a depersonalized planet where humans are kept as pets by those in control.

One house pet, who has managed to receive an education from his Draag master, escapes and discovers an underworld of other human refugees. From then on, the film describes a power struggle between the Draags and the Oms.

"FANTASTIC PLANET" goes the route of most of the silly American

science fiction movies yet it has none of the humor or craziness.

Films like "Planet of the Apes" at least have the good humor to play their material somewhat tongue-in-cheek.

"Fantastic Planet" unfolds its tale in an eerie, serious way—sort of like the portentous beginning of "2001."

Unfortunately, little beyond its look justifies such heavy-handed reverence. It raises our expectations for no good reason.

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